

**AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

**Listing of Claims**

1. (Original) A method of processing starch grain material for use in a fermenting process subsequently thereto, wherein prior to subjecting the material to the fermenting step, the material is subjected to a microwave irradiating step, and wherein the microwave irradiating step is effected on the starch grain material which is in a dry condition storable at a room temperature with simultaneous application of hot air current thereto.

2. (Original) The method according to claim 1, wherein the starch grain material comprises rice grains and at least a portion of the rice grains are used directly as sake-brewing rice without being subjected to a water-soaking step, steaming step, liquefying step or roasting step.

3. (Original) The method according to claim 1, wherein the starch grain material comprises starch grain material for koji, and this koji material is mixed with water containing koji mold spores to a moisture content of 25 to 40% and the resultant mixture is adjusted to a temperature suitable for growth of the koji mold spores so as to obtain koji.

4. (Original) A method of manufacturing a fermented product, comprising:

a microwave irradiating step for irradiating microwave to dry starch grain material storable at a room temperature with simultaneous application of hot air current thereto; and

a fermenting step for fermenting the starch grain material obtained from the microwave irradiating step, thereby to obtain the fermented product.

5. (Original) The method according to claim 4, wherein the starch grain material comprises rice grains and at least a portion of the rice grains are used directly as sake-brewing rice without being subjected to a water-soaking step, steaming step, liquefying step or roasting step.

6. (Original) The method according to claim 4, wherein the starch grain material comprises starch grain material for koji, and this koji material is mixed with water containing koji mold spores to a moisture content of 25 to 40% and the resultant mixture is adjusted to a temperature suitable for growth of the koji mold spores so as to obtain koji.

7. (Currently Amended) A processing apparatus for implementing the method of claim 1 for processing starch grain material before the material is subjected to a fermenting process subsequent thereto, the apparatus comprising:

a hot air blower capable of feeding hot air to the material; and  
a microwave irradiating device capable of irradiating microwave to the material while the hot air blower is feeding the hot air to the material simultaneously.